

27). Thus, a sorting stacking unit only sorts the mail supplied to it from its corresponding mail supplying unit. Thus, two mail items in different sorting stacking units are never sorted together into an intermediary sorted set and never end up in the final tray. Rather, because a sorting stacking units only sorts the mail items provided to it and does not handle mail items provided to a different sorting stacking units, two mail items in different sorting stacking units are sorted into different trays by their respective sorting stacking units.

In response to this argument, the Office Action of October 2, 2006 states that, "it is clear from the disclosure and figures 12A-12D that the trays from all of the sorting bins spend some time in areas 302 and 303 and thus trays from one stacked end up in different additional sorting regions." Applicant respectfully disagrees.

In Morikawa, the tray storage 300 is sectioned into four regions corresponding to the four sorting stacking units (col. 5, lines 27-29). Thus, each region of the tray storage 300 receives trays from only one of the sorting stacking units. Figure 11 of Morikawa shows one region of tray storage 300 corresponding to sorting stacking unit 210, which has three areas (first full tray storage area 351, second full tray storage area 361, and discharged all trays storage area 371) (col. 5, lines 29-35). Thus, the trays in any one region of tray storage 300 come from a single sorting stacking unit. Morikawa does not disclose or suggest that trays from two different sorting stacking units may be sorted into an intermediary sorted set in tray storage 300.

Figures 12A, 12B, 12C, and 12D show an example of a tray array executed in the first full tray storage area 351 of the tray storage 300 (col. 6, lines 5-7). Thus, the trays shown in Figures 12A-12D all come from a single sorting stacking unit (i.e., sorting stacking unit 210). That is, because storage area 351 is one of the three storage areas of the tray storage region corresponding to sorting stacking unit 210, the trays in storage area 351 all come from sorting stacking unit 210 (col. 5, lines 29-35).

The Office Action asserts that the sorting stacking units 210 and 230 of Morikawa are initial sorting regions. *See* Office Action, page 2, ¶3. However, the trays from sorting stacking units 210 and 230 are never sorted into an intermediary sorted set, as the trays from one sorting stacking unit are always kept separate from the trays of the other sorting stacking units.

Thus, Morikawa does not disclose or suggest “sorting the items in each of the at least two initial sorting regions into an intermediary sorted set by moving at least some of the items in at least one of the initial sorting regions between the at least one initial sorting region and at least two of the additional sorting regions,” as recited in claim 1, and claim 1 patentably distinguishes over Morikawa. Accordingly, it is respectfully requested that the rejection of Morikawa under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) be withdrawn.

Claims 2-8 depend from claim 1 and are patentable for at least the same reasons. Accordingly, it is respectfully requested that the rejection of these claims be withdrawn.

#### **Claim 9**

Claim 9 is directed to an apparatus for sorting a plurality of postal bins comprising: a plurality of sorting regions, wherein the plurality of sorting regions comprise for each sorting at least one initial region in which postal bins are initially located in an unsorted order, at least one return region in which postal bins are located after completion of sorting and at least one additional region used in the sorting; a first mechanism for physically moving at least one postal bin between at least two selected sorting regions; a second mechanism for physically moving at least one postal bin between positions within each sorting region; a postal bin location tracking mechanism; and controls operative for controlling the first and second mechanisms to move the postal bins into a predetermined sorted sequence at least partly in response to the tracking mechanism.

As should be clear from the foregoing, Morikawa fails to disclose or suggest “a first mechanism for physically moving at least one postal bin between at least two selected sorting regions.” In the system of Morikawa bins are not moved from the sorting stacking units to other locations in the system. Rather, the bins contain trays which, when filled with sorted mail, are moved to tray storage areas (col. 5, lines 23-37).

Thus, claim 9 patentably distinguishes over Morikawa. Accordingly, it is respectfully requested that the rejection of claim 9 under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) be withdrawn.

Claims 10-12 depend from claim 9 and are patentable for at least the same reasons. Accordingly, it is respectfully requested that the rejection of these claims be withdrawn.

**Claim 15**

Claim 15 is directed to an apparatus for sorting a plurality of postal bins comprising: a plurality of sorting regions, wherein the plurality of sorting regions comprise for each sorting at least one initial region in which postal bins are initially located in an unsorted order, at least one return region in which postal bins are located after completion of sorting and at least one additional region used in the sorting; means for physically moving at least one postal bin between at least two selected sorting regions of the plurality of sorting regions; means for physically moving at least one postal bin between positions within each of the plurality of sorting regions; means for tracking the location of postal bins; and means operative at least partly in response the tracking mechanism for controlling the first and second mechanisms to reposition postal bins into a predetermined sorted sequence.

As should be clear from the discussion above, Morikawa does not disclose or suggest, “means for physically moving at least one postal bin between at least two selected sorting regions of the plurality of sorting regions,” as recited in claim 15.

Thus, claim 15 patentably distinguishes over Morikawa. Accordingly, it is respectfully requested that the rejection of claim 15 under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) be withdrawn.